

**Testimony of Marichris Cariaga**  
**In Support of HB 5031: *An Act Concerning Sexual Violence on College Campuses***  
**March 6, 2012**

Senator Bye, Representative Willis, and honorable members of the Committee, I am Marichris Cariaga, a junior at the University of Connecticut in Storrs, CT, originally from Norwich, CT, and a Campus Action Intern for Planned Parenthood of Southern New England. I am testifying in support of HB 5031: *An Act Concerning Sexual Violence on College Campuses*. As a peer educator at the Health and Wellness Education Office, a member of several on-campus organizations including Students United for Reproductive Justice and UConn NOW, a nursing student with a women's studies minor, and an ally for sexual assault victims on campus, sexual violence is an issue that I personally have heard about first-hand and firmly believe is intolerable. This bill is imperative to ensure campus safety and further improve campus culture by implementing the first steps to end rape culture.

My freshman year, I enrolled in a one-credit course entitled *First Year Experience* that was advised, but not required for freshmen to take. The course intended to aid in the transition from high school to college-life. Only one class period talked about rape and consent, but the line of consent was surprisingly ambiguous to most of us. We were taught what consent was by defining what it is not; thus, rape is any form of sexual activity performed without *sober* consent. Although most students agreed, a few male students disagreed with the definition. Sobriety, they claimed, was not necessary for consent, but rather, someone *conveying* "yes" or simply *acting* lascivious (despite impaired judgment) amounted to sexual consent. In a survey of high school students, 56% of girls and 76% of boys believed forced sex was acceptable under some circumstances<sup>i</sup>. I believe that including policy that focuses on changing attitudes regarding sexual assault would lead to the elimination of the wrongly held belief of what *doesn't* constitute sexual violence, and strengthen comprehension of what does.

Recently, my university's Tier III student-run organization, UCTV, aired an episode of a student-written comedy sketch show in which the opening scene was supposedly a satire of rape. This, in itself, is problematic because rape is never funny. The clip contained very offensive language, particularly perpetuating victim-blaming. The clip showed a woman running from a perpetrator on UConn's "Rape Trail," a trail often used to connect on-campus housing with off-campus apartments. When the woman dialed the UConn Police from a Campus "Blue Light" Emergency phone, instead of contacting the police, she was subjected to misogynistic insults calling her a "blonde bitch, always crying about being raped," a "howler monkey," and much more surprisingly graphic language and appalling images suggesting that she would have "wished that she were raped by somebody else."

As a student whose student-fees and tuition pay for this student-funded, student-run organization, I was livid; and so were many others within the UConn community. During a mass protest which included a student-held forum, one of the demands made of UCTV was to strengthen its Code of Conduct, Broadcast Policies, and require mandatory sensitivity trainings to its staff by the Violence Against Women Prevention Program (VAWPP) on-campus before being able to produce videos for the organization. However, UCTV responded by saying that the mandatory VAWPP training was not something currently "feasible" for the organization.

Rape culture on college campuses exists and it is instances like those above, with a lack of stricter policies or real consequences, that perpetuate rape culture. Without much attention or open discussion focused on sexual assault on campus, the silence often leads to victim-shaming and resistance to reach out. The National Institute of Justice estimates 35 rapes per 1,000 female college students annually, but approximately 50% of *victims* don't think of sexual assault as rape, particularly when alcohol is involved or if there is no sign of physical injury<sup>ii</sup>. As a result, less than 5% of campus sexual assaults are brought to the authorities<sup>iii</sup>.

I advocate implementing strategies that will change current attitudes and beliefs toward sexual assault on college campuses, transmit a solid understanding of what constitutes sexual violence, and eradicate stigmas or hesitance associated with reporting cases. Ultimately, I support this bill because it should be a priority to ensure that the student body feels secure, valued, and safe at all times while attending the university. It will also play a role impacting how students view themselves, their safety, and furthermore, take a giant step toward ending rape culture that is prevalent on college campuses. Thus, I urge the committee to please support HB 5031. Thank you.

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i. *Acquaintance Rape: The Hidden Crime*, 1991.

ii. "College Campuses and Rape." [Online] Available: [http://www.crisisconnectioninc.org/sexualassault/college\\_campuses\\_and\\_rape.htm](http://www.crisisconnectioninc.org/sexualassault/college_campuses_and_rape.htm), 2002

iii. National Institute for Justice – *Sexual Assault on Campus: What Colleges and Universities are Doing About It* 2002.